

Puppies Puppies Estranges the Senses

At the New Museum, Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo gives us a verdant glimpse into her private life

BY JOHN BELKNAP IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 16 JAN 24



Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo squints her eyes and nods. She shifts her weight, changes position on a bed. Above her float nine paper lanterns the size of bean bags, each beaming a vespertine green that floods her skin, her hair and a selection of personal items taken from her bedroom at home: a bedside table, ruffled moss rugs, an inexpensive shelving unit, a puffer jacket and a slim sweater covered with craft-store faux leaves.



Puppies Puppies, 'Nothing New', 2023, exhibition view. Courtesy: New Museum; photograph: Dario Lasagni

For her first solo institutional show, 'Nothing New' at the New Museum, Kuriki-Olivo (a.k.a. Puppies Puppies) has taken up residence in the lobby gallery for a durational performance that perverts and estranges our senses of sight and sound. Revelling in the playfulness of readymades, the artist has carved up the space into a railroad-style apartment with a Zen garden to the front, a central bedroom and a back room full of budding marijuana trees. The gallery and the museum's café have both been stocked with a vast array of acid-green products (perhaps, a nod to her first name), including, but certainly not limited to: four jugs of emerald Fabuloso; six dark bottles of liquid chlorophyll; six bags of Lay's Sour Cream & Onion crisps; eight cans of Del Monte cut green beans; seven bottles of lime perrier; three jars of Loisa Sofrito; three canisters

of Dial aloe vera hand soap; 25 bottles of Ito En green tea; and two boxes of Ito En Oi Ocha green tea bags. In this reflexive environment interleaving performer, performance and product, the artist is omnipresent.



Puppies Puppies, 'Nothing New', 2023, exhibition view. Courtesy: New Museum; photograph: Dario Lasagni

Such furnishings, Kuriki-Olivo posits, are not merely passive objects: every choice we make as a consumer is political. Nearby, screens continually livestream both the exhibition site and spaces off-campus – such as Kuriki-Olivo's actual bedroom, on which this installation is modelled – in a continuing exploration of the political nature of private life. At play is a complicated negotiation between visibility and opacity: though the cameras run 24/7, the artist is not always present. Even within the gallery, a glass barrier separates her from the audience; sometimes, it blinks and turns opaque, staying a solid white for as long as she wants to make you wait. Kuriki-Olivo's earlier works – in which she worked under the pseudonym Puppies Puppies and largely obscured both her appearance and presence by donning costumes in performances such as *Liberty* (2017) or *Gollum* (2015) – can be read within the framework of what political theorist Wendy Brown termed 'freedom's silences'. In her essay 'In the "folds of our own discourse": The Pleasures and Freedoms of Silence' (1996), Brown observed that such concealment might be considered 'a means of preserving certain practices and dimensions of existence from regulatory power, from normative violence, as well as from the scorching rays of public exposure'. The freedom to remain silent is a tremendous source of power: silence can still be heard.

Following her gender transition in 2018, however, Kuriki-Olivo revised this approach with a supra-visual transparency in her practice. It's a claim that might also be made of 'Nothing New'. Yet not only does the oversaturation of information in this perversion of performance operate as a form of obfuscation – so, more manifestly, does the enchanted tinted glass. As we wait for the artist to return the opaque window to its transparent state, our recollection of the scene we were observing but a moment ago begins to fade and our grasp on the narrative loosens. Untethered, the plot becomes lost in the gloopy green glow that radiates, even oozes, throughout the gallery. Kuriki-Olivo allows us a glimpse of her private life – but only if we catch her gaze for an instant, right before she pulls the barrier between us firmly back down.



Puppies Puppies, 'Nothing New', 2023, exhibition view. Courtesy: New Museum; photograph: Dario Lasagni

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